

**William Thornton, Alexander White, and Tristram Dalton,
Commissioners to Thomas Jefferson, December 4,
1801, from Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital.
Edited by Saul K. Padover.**

Commissioners to Jefferson THE COMMISSIONERS TO THE PRESIDENT

December 4, 1801

The memorial of the Commissioners appointed by virtue of an act of Congress, entitled “An Act for establishing the temporary and permanent Seat of Government of the United States,” respectfully sheweth:

That on the 28th of January last, the Commissioners, addressed to the late President of the United States, a representation, stating such facts respecting the Business committed to their charge, as appeared necessary for the Information of the Government; which Representation was by him transmitted to Congress, and by their order referred to a committee; but no measures having taken place in consequence thereof, either by the Executive or Legislature, your memorialists deem it expedient to recapitulate the most important facts then stated, and to add such other facts and observations as may tend to enable the President to judge of the measures proper to be pursued by him, and to aid the Legislature in their deliberation, should the subject be submitted to their consideration.

The act of Congress authorizing the President to locate a District for the permanent Seat of the Government of the United States; the actual location of that District; the grant of lands for a federal city; the power given by the President to the Commissioners to sell that part of the Land so granted, which was placed at his disposal; the sale of six thousand lots

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to Morris and Greenleaf, by agreement dated 23d December, 1793; the modification of that agreement by another, entered

into in April, 1794; the failure of those gentlemen to fulfil their contracts, and the various measures pursued to obtain money to carry on the public Buildings, are recited in the above-mentioned Representation; and copies of the Legislative acts, Deeds, and other writings therein referred to, are annexed, and the whole printed for the use of the Members of Congress. The property belonging to the public is therein stated to consist of 24,655,735 Square feet of ground in the City of Washington, equal to 4,682 lots, of 5,265 Square feet each, exclusive of lots which bind on navigable waters — these form fronts to the extent of 2043 feet, and on them are four wharves in an useful state. Of the first mentioned lots, 3,178 lie N.E. of Massachusetts avenue, the remainder being fifteen hundred and four are situated So. W. of that Avenue; also, an Island, containing free Stone, in Aquia Creek in the State of Virginia. The above property your memorialists consider as worthy of public attention; its' value may be estimated by the prices at which lots have been heretofore sold, the cost of the wharves and the price of the Island.

Lots on the So. W. Side of Massachusetts avenue sold by the Commissioners since passing the guarantee Bill in 1796, average 343 Dollars per lot. Those on the N.E. Side of that Avenue sold by the

Commissioners and proprietors average 105 Dollars p[er] lot. Lots binding on navigable waters, sold within the same period, average \$12 71/100 the foot front. The Island cost 6000 Dollars, and the Wharves \$3,221 88/100, the whole amounting, at the rate lots have heretofore been sold, with the original cost of the Island, and wharves to \$884,819 88/100. The lots sold by the Commissioners since the date of the abovementioned Representation, exclusive of a Square sold to the United States, for the site of Marine Barracks, average \$470 71/100 p[er] lot. To elucidate more fully the real value of City Property, they have endeavored to ascertain the prices at which Proprietors have sold lots within the last eighteen Months, and so far as they have obtained Information, their Sales average \$579

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15/100 for cash and on short credit. \$921 37/100 on a credit of 4, 5 & 6 Years, per lot, and their ground Rents are from one to three Dollars per foot front.

Your Memorialists readily admit that the public property remaining for sale, is not on an average, equal in value to that which has been sold; yet, a great abatement was, in many Instances, made in the price of lots, in consideration of Building Contracts, and as inducements to purchase in the City have much increased; they conceive those on hand may, in the course

of a few years be disposed of, at least to as great advantage as those already sold; but if the Law authorising a Loan for the use of the City of Washington, should be carried strictly into effect, your Memorialists are apprehensive, that this property must be, in a great degree sacrificed. It is known that 200,000 Dollars have been borrowed of the State of Maryland under the Sanction of that Law, and that the City Property abovementioned is to be sold under the direction of the President of the United States, for the re-payment of that sum: an arrear of Interest to the amount of nine thousand Dollars is now due thereon; the accruing Interest of \$12,000 per annum, payable quarter-yearly, and the principal which is payable by annual Instalments of \$40,000 after the year 1803, are Sums which your Memorialists conceive, cannot be raised without frequent Sales for ready money, a measure which they consider as highly injurious, if carried to the extent necessary to answer those objects, and which they have in no Instance attempted, although the difficulties they have experienced in collecting Debts convince them that Sales on credit cannot be relied on for the punctual payment of the abovementioned Interest and Instalments; they therefore with great deference suggest the propriety of the Governments' paying the Money borrowed, and

reserving the Property pledged for it's repayment, to be sold as advantageous offers may occur — a policy which dictated the guarantee in 1796, and which has been fully justified by the Sales, made since that period. By pursuing a contrary policy, the property pledged will be greatly diminished by the payment of Interest only, while much larger Sums

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than are necessary to discharge both principal and Interest will probably lie dead in the Treasury.

Your memorialists also beg leave to state, that the Sum of fifty thousand Dollars in United States six per cent. stock, has been borrowed from the State of Maryland, to be repaid on the 1st of Novr. 1802, secured by the Bond of the Commissioners, and real and personal security given by private persons. The only fund applicable to the payment of this Sum at the disposal of the President or the Commissioners is, the Debts contracted for city lots purchased previous to passing the guarantee Law; this fund is indeed much more than sufficient, could those Debts be called in, to accomplish which, your memorialists have never ceased their exertions. They are now pursuing a measure not before attempted; a ready money Sale, in which, if they fail to sell the Property for as much

as is due thereon to the public, the same policy would dictate to the Government to pay this sum of fifty thousand Dollars likewise, the last-mentioned Debts to a much greater amount, being ultimately secure.

The Commissioners have only received Dolls. 53,281 $\frac{81}{100}$ from the sales of property pledged by virtue of the guarantee law. They have paid in conformity to that law, the Sum of \$29,687 $\frac{92}{100}$ to the original proprietors for property appropriated to public use, and 42,000 Dollars Interest which has accrued on money borrowed under the sanction of the same Law. This, the sum of \$18,406 $\frac{11}{100}$ derived from the funds applicable to the payment of Debts contracted on the personal security of the Commissioners, has been applied to the purposes of the guarantee, and thereby the necessity of selling at depreciated rates the Property pledged to Congress, has been avoided.

Your memorialists would also observe, that the Debts due and to become due, to the City Fund, and which were considered as good, were stated

in the last Representation to the President at \$144, 120 $\frac{80}{100}$. Since which, \$46,081 $\frac{99}{100}$ of those Debts have been received; but it may be observed, that the Sum of

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\$80,000, which by the agreement of April 1794, was to rest on the Bond of Morris, Greenleaf, & Nicholson, is not included in that description, although your Memorialists are advised by their Counsel that certain Squares in the City of Washington containing 1,000 lots are liable to the payment of that Sum; the same being designated by an agreement of 9th July 1794 as the lots, the payment for which was to rest on the Said Bond; and this point is now depending for decision in the Court of Chancery of the State of Maryland.

To shew the progress and the present state of Buildings in the City, your Memorialists have had the number of dwelling Houses taken, and find, by an accurate Report, that on the 15th of May 1800, there were 109 of brick & 263

of wood — and on the 15th of the last month there was an addition of 98 of brick & 151 of wood, besides 79 of brick, and thirty-five of wood, in an unfinished state; total amount, 735. Their particular situations will appear from the Schedule which accompanies this Memorial.

The above statement of facts and observations, are, with sentiments of the highest respect, submitted to the consideration of the President of the United-States.

WILLIAM THORNTON

ALEXANDER WHITE

TRISTRAM DALTON

Commrs. Office 4th Dec. 1801.

[Pp. 239–44, PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMISSIONERS, Vol. VI, 1800–02, in the National Archives; an inaccurate and abbreviated copy is printed in DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF... THE CAPITAL, 97–8; Annals of Congress, p. 1294, 7-2.]